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ABSTRACT

This teaching guide consists of a biography of the 35th President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, as well as a set of five worksheets to accompany the biography. The worksheets, which are based on the reading, are intended to help students in grades 3-5 reinforce their knowledge of the life and presidency of John Kennedy, while at the same time encouraging them to think critically and to provide thoughtful answers. The worksheets can be used as part of a unit or used separately according to the teacher's needs and the students' abilities. (BT)

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A Biography of John F. Kennedy: The 35th President of the United States

By Lisa Menéndez Weidman and Ellen Shea

Growing up in the Kennedy Family

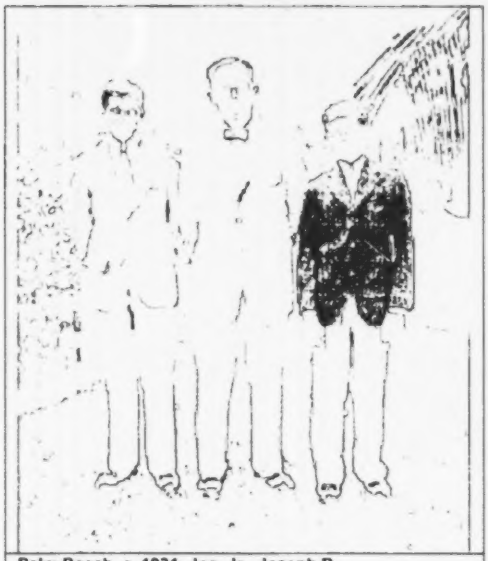
Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was a very disciplined and organized woman, made the following entry on a notecard, when her second child was born:

John Fitzgerald Kennedy
Born Brookline, Mass. (83 Beals Street) May 29, 1917

Hyannis Port, MA 1928. Eight of the nine Kennedy children pose for a photo. From youngest to oldest they are: Jean, Robert, Patricia, Eunice, Kathleen, Rosemary, Jack, and Joe, Jr.

In all, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy would have nine children, four boys and five girls. She kept notecards for each of them in a small wooden file box and made a point of writing down everything from a doctor's visit to the shoe size they had at a particular age. John Fitzgerald Kennedy was named in honor of Rose's father, John Francis Fitzgerald, the popular Boston Mayor who everybody knew as Honey Fitz. Before long, family and friends called this small blue-eyed baby, Jack. Jack was not a very healthy baby and on his notecard Rose also recorded the childhood diseases he suffered from : 'whooping cough, measles, chicken pox'. On February 20, 1920 when Jack was not yet three years old, he became sick with scarlet fever, a highly contagious and potentially life-threatening disease. His father, Joseph Patrick Kennedy, was terrified that little Jack would die. Mr. Kennedy went to the hospital every day to be by his son's side, and about a month later Jack took a turn for the better and recovered. But Jack was never very healthy, and because he was always suffering from one ailment or another his family used to joke about the great risk a mosquito took in biting him – with some of his blood the mosquito was almost sure to die!

When Jack was three, the Kennedys moved to a new home a few blocks away from their old house in Brookline, a neighborhood just outside of Boston. It was a lovely house with twelve rooms, turreted windows, and a big porch. Full of energy and ambition, Jack's father worked very hard at becoming a successful businessman. When he was a student at Harvard College and having a difficult time fitting in as an Irish Catholic, he swore to himself he would make a million dollars by the age of thirty-five. There was a lot of prejudice against Irish Catholics in Boston at that time, but Joseph Kennedy was determined to succeed. Jack's great-grandparents had come from Ireland and managed to provide for their families, despite many hardships. Jack's grandfathers did even better for themselves, both becoming prominent Boston politicians. Jack, because of all his family had done, could enjoy a very comfortable life. The Kennedys had everything they needed and more.



Palm Beach, c. 1931. Joe, Jr., Joseph P. Kennedy, Jack

There was always something going on in the Kennedy family home. By the time Jack was eight there were seven children altogether. Jack had an older brother, Joe; four sisters, Rosemary, Kathleen, Eunice, and Patricia; and a younger brother, Robert. Jean and Teddy hadn't been born yet. Nannies and housekeepers helped Rose run the household.

At the end of the school year, the Kennedy children would go to their summer home in Hyannis Port on Cape Cod where they liked swimming, sailing, and playing touch football. The Kennedy children played hard, and they enjoyed competing with one another. Joseph Sr. encouraged these competitions, especially among the boys. He was a father with very high expectations and wanted the boys to win at sports and everything they tried. As he often said, 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going'. But sometimes these competitions went too far. One time when Joe suggested that he and Jack race on their bicycles, they collided head-on. Joe emerged unscathed while Jack had to have twenty-eight stitches. Because Joe was two years older and stronger than Jack, whenever they fought, Jack would usually get the worst of it. Jack was the only sibling who posed any real threat to Joe's throne as the oldest child. The next in line were girls, and Bobby and Teddy were still too young to be anything but pests.

Jack was very popular and had many friends at Choate, a boarding school for adolescent boys in Connecticut. He played tennis, basketball, football, and golf and also enjoyed reading. His friend Lem Billings remembers how unusual it was that Jack had a daily subscription to the *New York Times* newspaper. Jack had a 'clever, individualist mind', his Head Master once noted, though he was not the best student. He did not always work as hard as he could, except in history and English, which were his favorite subjects. 'Now Jack', his father wrote in a letter one day, 'I don't want to give the impression that I am a nagger, for goodness knows I think that is the worse thing any parent can be, and I also feel that you know if I didn't really feel you had the goods I would be most charitable in my attitude toward your failings. After long experience in sizing up people I definitely know you have the goods and you can go a long way…It is very difficult to make up fundamentals that you have neglected when you were very young, and that is why I am urging you to do the best you can. I am not expecting too much, and I will not be disappointed if you don't turn out to be a real genius, but I think you can be a really worthwhile citizen with good judgment and understanding'.

Jack graduated from Choate and in 1936 he started his first year at Harvard, where Joe was already a student. Like his brother Joe, Jack played football. He was not as good of an athlete as Joe but he had a lot of determination and perseverance. Unfortunately, one day while playing he ruptured a disk in his spine. Jack never really recovered from this accident and his back continued to bother him for the rest of his life.

The two eldest boys were attractive, agreeable, and intelligent young men and Mr. Kennedy had high hopes for them both. However, it was Joe who had announced to everyone when he was a young boy that he would be the first Catholic to become President. No one doubted him for a moment. Jack, on the other hand, seemed somewhat less ambitious. He was active in student groups and sports and he worked hard in his history and government classes, though his grades remained only average. Late in 1937, Mr. Kennedy was appointed United States Ambassador to England and moved there with his whole family, with the exception of Joe and Jack who were at Harvard. Because of his father's job, Jack became very interested in European politics and world affairs. After his summer visit to England and other countries in Europe, Jack returned to Harvard more eager to learn about history and government and to keep up with current events.

Hyannis Port, c. 1946. John F. Kennedy

Joe and Jack frequently received letters from their father in England, who informed them of the latest news regarding the conflicts and tensions that everyone feared would soon blow up into a full-scale war. Adolph Hitler ruled Germany and Benito Mussolini ruled Italy. They both had strong armies and wanted to take land from other countries. On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland and World War II began.

By this time Jack was a senior at Harvard and decided to write his thesis on the reasons why Great Britain was unprepared for war with Germany. It was so good that it was later published as a book called *Why England Slept*. In June 1940 Jack graduated from Harvard. His father sent him a cablegram from London: TWO THINGS I ALWAYS KNEW ABOUT YOU ONE THAT YOU ARE SMART TWO THAT YOU ARE A SWELL GUY LOVE DAD.

World War II and a future in politics

Lt. John F. Kennedy aboard his PT-109 boat in 1943

Soon after graduating, both Joe and Jack joined the Navy. Joe was a flyer and sent to Europe, while Jack was made Lieutenant (Lt.) and assigned to the South Pacific as commander of a patrol torpedo boat, the *PT-109*. Lt. Kennedy had a crew of twelve men whose mission was to stop the enemy Japanese ships from delivering supplies to their soldiers. On the dark night of August 2, 1943 Lt. Kennedy's crew patrolled the waters looking for enemy ships to sink. A Japanese destroyer suddenly became visible. But it was traveling at full speed and headed straight at them. Holding the wheel, Lt. Kennedy tried to swerve out of the way, but to no avail. The much larger Japanese warship rammed the *PT-109*, splitting it in half and killing two of Lt. Kennedy's men. The others managed to jump off as their boat went up in flames. Lt. Kennedy was slammed hard against the cockpit, once again injuring his weak back. Patrick McMahon, one of his crew members, had horrible burns on his face and hands and was ready to give up. In the darkness Lt. Kennedy managed to find him and haul him back to where the other survivors were clinging to a piece of the boat that

was still afloat. At sunrise, Lt. Kennedy led his men toward a small island several miles away. Despite his own injuries, Lt. Kennedy was able to tow Patrick McMahon ashore, a strap from McMahon's life jacket clenched between his teeth. Six days later two native islanders found them and went for help, delivering a message Jack had written on a piece of coconut shell. The next day, the *PT-109* crew was rescued. Jack's brother Joe was not so lucky. He died a year later when his plane blew up during a dangerous mission in Europe.

When he returned home, Jack was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for his leadership and courage. With the war finally coming to an end, it was time to choose the kind of work he wanted to do. Jack had considered becoming a teacher or a writer, but with Joe's tragic death suddenly everything changed. After serious discussions with Jack about his future, Joseph Kennedy convinced him that he should make his family proud and run for a seat in Massachusetts' eleventh congressional district, which he won in 1946. This was the beginning of Jack's political career. As the years went on, John F. Kennedy, a Democrat, served three terms (six years) in the House of Representatives, and in 1952 he was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Soon after being elected senator, John F. Kennedy, at thirty-six years of age, married twenty-four year-old Jacqueline Bouvier, a writer with the *Washington Times-Herald*. Unfortunately, early on in their marriage, Senator Kennedy's back started to hurt again and he had two operations. While recovering from surgery, he wrote a book about several U.S. senators who had risked their careers to fight for the things in which they believed. The book, called *Profiles in Courage*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for biography in 1957. That same year, the Kennedys' first child, Caroline, was born.

John F. Kennedy was becoming a popular politician. In 1956 he was almost picked to run for Vice President. Having been defeated, Kennedy decided that he would run for President in the next election. He began working very long hours and traveling all around the United States on weekends. On July 13, 1960 the Democratic party nominated him as its candidate for President. Kennedy asked Lyndon B. Johnson, a senator from Texas, to run with him as Vice President. In the general election on November 8th 1960, Kennedy beat Republican Richard M. Nixon in a very close race. At the age of forty-three, Kennedy was the youngest man elected President and the first Catholic. Before his inauguration, his second child, John Jr., was born. His father liked to call him John-John.

John F. Kennedy: The 35th President of the United States

John F. Kennedy was sworn in as the 35th President on January 20, 1961. In his inaugural speech he spoke of the need for all Americans to be active citizens. 'Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," he said. He also asked the nations of the world to join together to fight what he called the "common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."

White House, 1962. Jacqueline Kennedy, President Kennedy, Mme. Malraux, and violinist Isaac Stern at a dinner reception in honor of Andre Malraux, French Minister of Cultural Affairs

President Kennedy, together with his wife and two children, brought a new, youthful spirit to the White House. The Kennedys believed that the White House should be a place to celebrate American history, culture, and achievement. They invited artists, writers, scientists, poets, musicians, actors, and athletes to visit them. Jacqueline Kennedy also shared the same interest in American history as her husband. Gathering the finest art and furniture the United States had produced, she restored all the rooms in the White House to make it a place that truly reflected America's history with a sense of beauty. Everyone was impressed and appreciated her hard work.

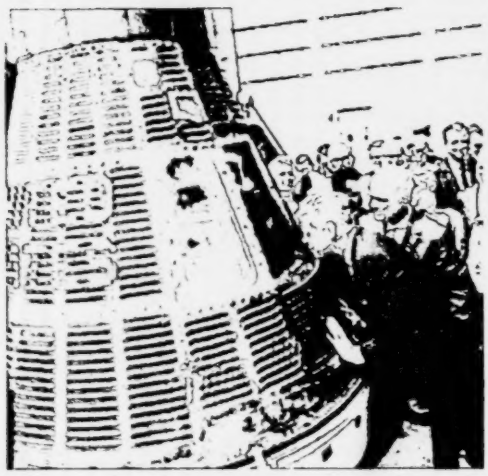
The White House also seemed like a fun place, because of the Kennedys' two young children, Caroline and John-John. There was a pre-school, a swimming pool, and a tree-house outside on the White House lawn. President Kennedy was probably the busiest man in the country, but he still found time to laugh and play with his children.

However, the President also had many worries. One of the things he worried about most was the possibility of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. He knew that if there was a war, millions of people would die. Since World War II, there had been a lot of anger and suspicion between the two countries but never any shooting between Soviet and American troops. This 'Cold War', which was unlike any other war the world had seen, was really a struggle between the Soviet Union's communist system of government and the United States' democratic system. Because they distrusted each other, both countries spent enormous amounts of money building nuclear weapons. There were many times when the struggle between the Soviet Union and the United States could have ended in disaster or war, such as in Cuba and in the city of Berlin.

President Kennedy worked long hours, getting up at seven and not going to bed until eleven or twelve at night, or later. He read six newspapers while he ate breakfast, had meetings with important people throughout the day, and read reports from his advisers. He wanted to make sure that he made the best decisions for his country. 'I am asking each of you to be new pioneers in that New Frontier' he said. The New Frontier was not a place but a way of thinking and acting. President Kennedy wanted the United States to move forward into the future with new discoveries in science and improvements in education, employment and other fields. He wanted democracy and freedom for the whole world.

One of the first things President Kennedy did was to create the Peace Corps. Through this program, which still exists today, Americans can volunteer where help is needed. They can help in areas such as education, farming, health care, and construction. Many young men and women have served as Peace Corps volunteers and have won the respect of many people throughout the world.

President Kennedy with his two children, Caroline and John, Jr., in the Oval Office



Cape Canaveral, 1962. President Kennedy and John Glenn

President Kennedy was also eager for the United States to lead the way in exploring space. The Soviet Union was ahead of the United States in its knowledge of space and President Kennedy was determined to catch up. He said, 'No nation which expects to be the leader of other nations can expect to stay behind in this race for space'. Kennedy was the first President to ask Congress to approve more than twenty two billion dollars for 'Project Apollo', which had the goal of landing an American man on the moon before the end of the decade.

President Kennedy had to deal with many serious problems here in the United States. The biggest problem of all had to do with racial discrimination. The US Supreme Court had ruled in 1954 that segregation in public schools would no longer be permitted. Black children and White children should be able to go to school together. This was now the law of the land. However, there were many schools, especially in southern states, that did not obey this law. There was also racial segregation on buses, in restaurants, movie theaters, and other public places.

Thousands of Americans joined together, people of all races and backgrounds, to peacefully protest this injustice. Martin Luther King, Jr. was one of the famous leaders of the movement for civil rights. Many civil rights leaders didn't think President Kennedy was supportive enough of their efforts. The President believed that holding public protests would only anger many white people and make it even more difficult to convince the members of Congress who didn't agree with him to pass civil rights laws. By June 11, 1963, however, President Kennedy decided that the time had come to take stronger action to help the civil rights struggle. He proposed a new Civil Rights bill to the Congress and he went on television asking Americans to end racism. '*One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free*,' he said. 'This Nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds...[and] on the principle that all men are created equal.' President Kennedy made it clear that all Americans, regardless of their skin color, should enjoy a good and happy life in the United States.

President Kennedy meets the leaders of the civil rights movement

The President is shot

On November 21, 1963, President Kennedy flew to Texas to give several political speeches. The next day, as his car drove slowly past cheering crowds in Dallas, shots rang out. Kennedy was seriously wounded and died a short time later. Within a few hours of the shooting, police arrested Lee Harvey Oswald and charged him with the murder. On November 24, another man, Jack Ruby, shot and killed Oswald, thus silencing the only person who could have offered more information about this tragic event. The Warren Commission was organized to investigate the assassination and to clarify the many questions which remained.

The Legacy of John F. Kennedy

President Kennedy's death caused enormous sadness and grief among all Americans. Most people still remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news of the murder. Hundreds of thousands of people gathered in Washington for the President's funeral, and millions throughout the world watched it on television.

As the years have gone by and other Presidents have written their chapters in history, John Kennedy's brief time in office stands out in people's memories for his leadership, personality, and accomplishments. Many respect his coolness when faced with difficult decisions--like what to do about the missiles in Cuba. Others admire his ability to inspire people with his eloquent speeches. Still others think his compassion and his willingness to fight for new government programs to help the poor, the elderly and the ill were most important. Like all leaders, John Kennedy made mistakes, but he was always optimistic about the future. He believed that people could solve their common problems if they put their country's interests first and worked together.

Who was John F. Kennedy?
Worksheets for students grades three through five

To teachers: Please find following a set of five worksheets to accompany *A Biography of John F. Kennedy: the 35th President of the United States.* Using the lens of biography, these worksheets are intended to help students reinforce their knowledge of the life and presidency of John F. Kennedy while at the same time encouraging them to think critically to provide thoughtful answers. The worksheets can be used as part of a coherent unit or used separately in accordance with teachers' needs and the particular abilities of their students. Please feel free to use the following worksheets in your classroom, which are appropriate for students in grades three through five.

Your feedback: Please send your comments and ideas to Lisa Menéndez Weidman at lisa.menendez@nara.gov

Who was this person?

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Notice that each statement contains one bolded and capitalized letter. Write this letter in the corresponding blank below.

Example:

1. His great grandparents were immigrants from Ir**E**land.

___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	___	E	___	___
10	9	6	4	11	7	3	2	5	1	8	12

2. He was bor**N** in Brookline, Massachusetts.
3. He had thr**E**e brothers and five sisters.
4. He spe**N**t much of his childhood sick in bed.
5. He was often late for meals and didn't keep his room very **N**eat as a child.
6. He received a 'C' in government at **H**arvard.
7. He saved himself and his crew, during World War II, by using a coconut and his poc**K**etknife.
8. He loved to rea**D**.
9. He loved sailing and the **O**cean.
10. As a **J**unior senator, he had a serious back operation and almost died.
11. He was the **F**irst Catholic ever elected president.
12. He was the **Y**oungest elected president of the United States.

Who am I?

Directions: Use this sheet to take notes on aspects of yourself you think others might want to know. You can use these notes as a starting point to write your full autobiography in the future.

My Self-Portrait:

Full name (including middle name):_____

Birth date:_____ Birth place_____

In my family I am the (circle one): oldest, middle, youngest, or only child.

Names of people living with me in my house: _____

_____

Total number of people in my family (including aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.): _____

My favorite school subject(s):_____

Things/activities I like to do: _____

_____

My heroes are: _____

One thing most people don't know about me is: _____

_____

One word to describe my personality is:_____

My goal(s) in life are:_____

_____

Over →

☆☆ BONUS QUESTIONS ☆☆

1. What is the difference between an autobiography and a biography?

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. Which one – an autobiography or a biography – do you think gives a more accurate account of a person's life? Why?

_____

_____

_____

_____

The Young John Fitzgerald Kennedy: What was he like?

1. What sports or activities did he like to do?

2. What do you think it was like being 2nd oldest and having an older brother in a large family?

2. What was John F. Kennedy like in school?

3. What illnesses or injuries did he suffer from as a young person?

4. Why was John F. Kennedy awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and a citation for 'extremely heroic conduct' during World War II?

John F. Kennedy serving his country: The Congressman and Senator, 1947-1960

Directions: Read about John F. Kennedy between the years 1947-1960 and then fill in the blanks below with the correct information.

After coming home from the war, John F. Kennedy was elected to his first political office in the year _____. In total, he served as a Congressman from the state of _____for _____ terms, the equivalent of six years. Then, in 1952 he was elected to the United States Senate. One year later, when John F. Kennedy was thirty six years old, he married _____. Unfortunately, early on in their marriage, JFK began having back pain again and went to the hospital for surgery. While he was recovering at the Kennedy family home in Florida, he wrote the Pulitzer prize winning book called _____ about several U.S. Senators who risked their careers to fight for the issues and causes they believed in. When he felt better, he returned to Washington D.C. in May 1955 to continue his duties as Senator. In 1960 he ran for President against the Republican candidate _____ and won. John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as the 35th President of the United States on January 20, 1961. At the inauguration he made a memorable speech and said "Ask not _____ _____.

The Presidency of John F. Kennedy

Directions: Focus on the years 1961 to 1963 when John F. Kennedy was President and choose three things that he did that you think others should remember about him as the 35th President of the United States. Explain your answer.

JFK should be remembered for the following things:

1. _____

I think this because _____

_____

_____

2. _____

I think this because _____

_____

_____

3. _____

I think this because _____

_____

_____

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